

Protecting family assets part of message at dementia caregivers conference

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Jami Coleman will talk on "Dementia Caregiving and Estate Planning: Why It's Important and How to Use It." (Photo: Gerald Tookes)

For too many African Americans, caring for a loved one with dementia can be a hard road. Coming next week in Tallahassee is a conference designed to celebrate the work of these dementia caregivers and offer new ideas and support – not just for their physical and emotional health, but also for their financial health.

The African-American Alzheimer's Caregiver Training Conference is scheduled from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. June 29 at the Old West Enrichment Center. The free Saturday conference will include presentations, breakout groups, and caregiver and community resource panel discussions. Respite care will be provided by Elder Day Stay, part of Elder Care Services. Lunch will be free.

"Our hope is that caregivers will leave this conference feeling empowered and appreciated," said organizer Tomeka Norton-Brown, coordinator of the ACTS 2 Project (African-American Alzheimer's Caregiver Training and Support), based at the Florida State University College of Medicine. "We've lined up speakers who will provide valuable insights on caring for their family members and caring for themselves."

One of those speakers is Jami Coleman, a partner at Williams & Coleman, P.A. in Tallahassee. She has seen too many examples of families where an elder's dementia had a devastating effect on family finances.

"Many black families today have the opportunity to amass wealth for generations to come, but have not put into place tools to protect their assets and to keep the wealth they accumulate," said Coleman, whose talk is titled "Dementia Caregiving and Estate Planning: Why It's Important and How to Use It." "They will benefit from discussion about the tools needed to protect their assets and properly plan for their life and beyond."

Also speaking will be Soheyla Mahdavian, associate pharmacy professor at Florida A&M University, who will present a caregiver's guide to the prevention and treatment of dementia. She has worked with adults with dementia and caregivers for 10 years. As a board-certified geriatric pharmacist, her early work focused on helping people experiencing memory difficulties. She now works with people with late-stage dementia who require behavioral and medication-related assessment.

Another scheduled speaker is the Rev. Lonnie Wesley III, former caregiver and current pastor of Greater Little Rock Baptist Church in Pensacola.

"This is the first of what we hope will be annual conferences," said Lisa Bretz, executive director of Advantage Aging Solutions, one of the conference's sponsors. "The need for culturally sensitive caregiver training is a major goal of Florida's Area Agencies on Aging."

Other conference sponsors are ACTS 2, Tallahassee Memorial HealthCare Memory Disorder Clinic, and the North and Central Florida Geriatric Workforce Enhancement Partnership.